

**Office Locations:**

Eau Claire, La Crosse,
Medford, Menomonie,
Rhinelander, Rice Lake,
Shell Lake, Wausau

NORTHWEST WISCONSIN MANUFACTURING OUTREACH CENTER (NWMOC)

In coordination with the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership, serving 33 counties in northwest Wisconsin through the University of Wisconsin-Stout and five technical college partners. Chippewa Valley, Northcentral, Nicolet Area, Wisconsin Indianhead and Western Wisconsin Technical Colleges. Contact: Joe Benkowski, 278 Jarvis Hall, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, (715) 232-2397, Fax: (715) 232-1105, Email: benkowski@uwstout.edu, Website: <http://nwmoc.uwstout.edu/>

THE MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP IN WISCONSIN

Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is a nationwide system of services and support for smaller manufacturers to become more globally competitive. At the heart of the system is a network of affiliated, locally-based manufacturing extension centers. Each center, like NWMOC, is a partnership, typically involving federal, state, and local governments; industry; educational institutions; and other sources of expertise, information and funding support.

COMPANY CLIPS**Custom Urethane Goes With The "Flow"**

Custom Urethane casts a variety of plastic parts based on customer designs. Founded in 1989 and located in Osceola, the company employs 20 full-time people. Custom Urethane faced the problems of slow growth, cash flow bottlenecks, and unprofitability based on lack of a competitive market position. When the company's president, Dennis Johnson, heard about the work the Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center (NWMOC) had done to generate drastic improvements in another company, he contacted the Center for more information about its flow manufacturing program.

NWMOC helped Custom Urethane implement flow manufacturing principles into its production system. NWMOC first provided flow manufacturing training to all company employees, and then facilitated a five-day implementation program in which Custom Urethane employees applied flow principles they learned during the training to redesign their workplace. With NWMOC's guidance, employees mapped processes on a flow chart and analyzed them to identify areas of improvement, transitioning line operations from a craftsman approach to production to a flow manufacturing system. After changing the manufacturing processes and creating a new production line, employee teams turned their attention to redesigning the plant's physical layout. The new plant layout includes a conveyor to move the molds more efficiently, and makes more efficient use of all the company's equipment. NWMOC staff facilitated the implementation of a kanban system in the plant, which employs visual cues to improve line processes. These changes improved worker productivity, material flow, and oven utilization. In fact, Custom Urethane's changes have saved the company \$104,000 in labor costs, \$15,000 inventory, \$40,000 per year in material costs, and \$5,000 per year in electrical costs. Next year, Custom Urethane is anticipating a \$1 million sales increase as a direct result of the changes suggested by NWMOC.

Continued

STATE STATS

DATA* COVERS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2001

Number of projects completed
with firms
164

Number of firms served
116

Number of firms served for
the first time
53

Federal cost share for current
operating year
\$403,200

State/other cost share for current
operating year
\$806,400

**Data as reported from center*

DATA** COVERS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2001

Increased sales & retained sales
\$16,140,580

Client capital investment
\$10,425,500

Total cost savings
\$4,421,000

Jobs (created & retained)
78

***Source: Independent client impact survey*



Flow Manufacturing Lightens Up Western Wisconsin Plastics Corp.

Western Wisconsin Plastics Corporation, founded in 1991, vacuum forms translucent acrylic covers for lighting in commercial buildings. A significant portion of the company's production output is for new applications designed by lighting manufacturers. The company, located in West Salem, employs less than 20 people.

Western Wisconsin Plastics (WWP) has a long history with the Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center (NWMOC). During a visit to the plant, NWMOC staff recognized an opportunity to apply flow-manufacturing principles. NWMOC invited WWP President Michael Mattie to attend a flow-manufacturing seminar sponsored by the Incumbent Worker Project, directed by Workforce Connections (PIC) in La Crosse. Attending the seminar convinced Mr. Mattie that flow manufacturing would benefit his company.

NWMOC helped WWP apply flow manufacturing principles to its manufacturing and business systems. NWMOC staff conducted a flow manufacturing seminar for employees at the WWP plant with the assistance of the local technical college. Western Wisconsin Technical College provided an interpreter for Hmong (an Asian population) employees. This seminar provided a description of flow manufacturing and a step-by-step procedure for implementation. After the seminar, NWMOC staff provided coaching assistance as WWP implemented flow manufacturing techniques. WWP's new manufacturing techniques yielded a total cost savings of \$220,000 for the company. Some improvements, such as a \$12,000 per year reduction in the cost of materials, will generate long-term savings for WWP. The company is now projecting a \$100,000 annual sales growth.